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# THE BRITISH MISSION TO TIBET.

BY SIR WALTER LAWRENCE.

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SOME day when the history of the Mission to Tibet is written, there will be presented to the world a tale of unrivalled picturesqueness, pathos and romance. To those who love to read of the toils and difficulties of explorers, of heroic endeavor and inevitable disappointment, Lhasa has always been a familiar and fabulous name, a tantalizing mirage, a Dead Sea fruit. To those, and they are many, who have sympathies with the Buddhist religion, Lhasa has been a very Mecca, and those who most care for Buddhism have been content that the thick veil which has shrouded the mysterious city should remain undrawn. And to those who have lived near the "Roof of the World," the home of the ill-starred Dalai Lamas has ever been a puzzle and a baffling anachronism, a mystic and melancholy evidence of the limitations of Western influence face to face with a truly Oriental situation. For centuries the mystery might have endured and the Dalai Lama and his advisers might have kept the world at bay. In Darjeeling to the south, and in Buddhist Ladak away to the west, the curious have been content to hear of the wonders of Lhasa from the simple, faithful folk fresh back from the terraced city, and have deemed themselves fortunate to be the purchasers of quaint lamps and praying-wheels fashioned by the cunning artisans of sacred Lhasa. When, from time to time, an adventurous traveller essayed to reach the court of the helpless Pontiff of the Buddhists, men smiled and knew that the journey would be in vain, and that, were he the very prince of explorers, he would be gently but effectively warned off the dreary regions that encompass the Vatican of Buddhism. Lhasa would have remained the North Pole of Oriental voyage and lingered on as an unknown quantity to an all-knowing, inquisitive world, had it not been

for the lamentable and unnecessary activities of the Buriat agent, Dorjief, and the unneighborly trespass of our good friends the Russians. In this dreary iron age of facts and statistics, we can ill spare the romantic mystery that has hung around Lhasa; and, however much the utilitarians may rejoice over discovery and the revelation of realities, the world at large will be the poorer, and the Buddhist millions and the millions of dreamers East and West, who want their dreams, will live to curse Dorjief, the deceiver, and Russia, the provoker of strife.

It is not the purpose of this article to give a detailed history of the events which have led to the regrettable, though inevitable, losses which were inflicted by British troops on the Tibetans at the end of March. Details full and free have been given by the press, but it is well to recall some of the most important facts which emerge from this nightmare of enterprise and achievement.

First, we must notice the forbearance shown by the Government of India. For eight long months, that quiet, pacific political officer, Colonel Younghusband, has been perched on the cold mountains vainly endeavoring to convince the fatuous monks of Lhasa that he was there on serious business. For months, the troops of General Macdonald's small force have been suffering hardships which have taxed to the utmost the cheery Gurkhas and the steadfast Sikhs; and, over those who know the passes in the late spring and autumn, an involuntary shiver will pass when they think of what it means to be out on the country between the Jelap-la and the Tung-la in the winter months. Move your hand or foot from under the blankets, as you lie trying to sleep at night, and you will probably find it frozen. When the sun rises and the bitter wind draws up the valley, the icy dust blows into your lungs, your breath freezes and you must beware of frost-bite, breathlessness, and the various symptoms of mountain-sickness. Then a hurricane arises, and the air is charged with stones and ice. Long months of misery were nobly borne by officers and men in this frigid hell of filth and unheard-of discomforts. At the same time, it was only a mission, and there might be no fighting, save the awful and unequal fight against nature; and to the Gurkhas, Sikhs and the British soldiers of the Mountain Battery and the Machine Gun section this was a business which passed their understanding. But to the authorities in India, the difficulties were well known; and, if the expedition could have started,

as was intended, in May, even then the enterprise would have been the most arduous ever attempted by the always ready army of India. Whatever may come of the great exploit, one thing has been achieved. An object-lesson in brave endurance and determined force has been given, and in spite of loss and suffering such lessons act as a tonic on the great continent of India, and as a prophylactic on our restless neighbors beyond the frontier.

Admirable patience has been displayed throughout. There has not been wanting the jeering criticism and the sneer at the "*impasse*" created by the ignorance of Lhasa and the almost insuperable difficulties of the mountains. Calamity followed calamity. Lightning destroyed the stores at Rora-thang—stores which had been painfully dragged up the cruel track. The useful yaks which had been collected in thousands for us by the friendly Nepalese Government utterly failed as a transport animal, and we have gone back to our old friend the mule. The story of the yaks, and of the devotion of the officers who were charged with the duty of bringing them from Nepal across Sikkim to the Chumbi Valley, commands our wonder and admiration. It was a march of months through the most awful country, and the march was dogged by anthrax, foot-and-mouth disease and pleuro-pneumonia. Over 2,500 yaks perished. As marking the long-suffering, though perhaps futile, consideration of the Indian Government, one may note that the original idea of taking the yaks into Khamba-Jong across a corner of Tibet was abandoned, as the Tibetans threatened to shoot both yaks and their drivers, and to avoid a conflict the circuitous and, as it turned out, the fatal route through Sikkim was adopted. Every day brought some fresh news of suffering bravely and cheerfully endured, and every day India wondered whether the Viceroy would throw up the game in sheer despair, baffled by the rocky barriers and the passive resistance of Tibet, and the elusive tactics of China and her impossible Ambans. But those who knew the facts regarding the British Government in India, and still more those who knew the character and policy of the great statesman who is at present responsible for India's welfare and safety, knew that there would be no drawing back. The track might be overwhelmed in a landslide, or lightning, frost and snow might do their worst; but there could be no drawing back, for all India was watching, and, far away in Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan and Siam, men were waiting

for news. All this was, no doubt, considered when the Government reluctantly came to the conclusion that the Tibetan farce was passing into serious drama. They had reckoned the cost and the difficulties, and had decided that the interests at stake in Tibet demanded drastic measures. They knew, as every Indian Government knew, that however small, or however large, the undertaking might be, it must be successful, or trouble would follow. For, in the East, the only thing which is understood and appreciated is force, and successful force. The Indians knew that we were not scaling the mountain walls of Tibet for the sake of annexing that dreary and sterile country, and that we were not risking the lives of our troops merely as an act of reprisal for the insults and flouts of a dreamy and ignorant community of monks. It is true that the contumacy, and wanton neglect of treaty obligations, which we have experienced at the hands of the evasive and intangible Government of Lhasa for the last fifteen years, have not conduced to enhance our prestige on the north-east frontiers of India. It was possible that the contemptuous treatment of the Viceroy's letters returned from Lhasa unopened might, if unnoticed, have been followed by further insult, and in the East the spirit of contumacy is catching. British relations with Nepal are of the most satisfactory nature, and it is of first importance that they should continue so. For Nepal, strategically, is the very keystone of the Indian frontier, and is one of our most important recruiting-grounds, for it is from Nepal that we obtain our brave little Gurkhas, who with the Sikhs form the backbone of our Indian army. And it is not improbable that, if we had gone on meekly acquiescing in the ridiculous attitude of Tibet, Nepal might have had doubts as to our real power, and the thought might have arisen that the policy adopted by Tibet might equally well be followed in Nepal. Ideas spread with fatal rapidity in India, and all roads lead to Lhasa. A few years more of forbearance, and Bhutan and Burma might be taking a leaf out of the book of the Dalai Lama. It was high time to enforce the treaty which followed our successful operations when we drove the Tibetan raiders out of our tributary state of Sikkim. For the first treaty was a dead letter and the restrictions on trade remained unabated. A similar fate has attended the later regulations, which were framed by Great Britain and China, for enforcing the terms of the treaty. Various acts of practical hos-

tility have been committed by the nebulous Government of Lhasa; but, in spite of all, there was a certain tenderness for this Old World antediluvian Tibet, and we probably should not have taken Tibet and its ways seriously, had we not discovered that, for all its seeming ignorance of the outside world, Lhasa was entering into relations with Russia.

It cannot be impressed too strongly upon those who care to understand the problems of India, that the one thing which all Viceroys desire is to be allowed to develop India and her resources, to extend railways and irrigation, to reduce taxation, and to improve the various branches of an administration which affects the lives and happiness of one-fifth of the entire human race. All Viceroys have prayed for peace on the frontiers of India, and freedom from famine and cataclysms within her borders; and none of them has prayed for peace more fervently, or wrought more earnestly to ensue peace, than Lord Curzon. From the first day he assumed office, more than five years ago, he has taken up, with his characteristic energy and fortitude, burning questions of reform which have for years awaited and called for the man of action. Education, on which so much of India's future depends; police, which affects the inner lives of the people so disastrously unless it be efficient and honest; railways, such potent factors in progress and prosperity; and irrigation, which fills the granaries when drought is working havoc and famine in waterless tracts, have all formed the subject of the Viceroy's most careful thought, and in all he has effected material and far-reaching improvements. Firmly and of set purpose he has devoted himself to the less conspicuous enterprises of peace, and has avoided the more flowery field of territorial expansion. When he took office in 1899, there were 10,000 British troops stationed across the administrative border of British India. Now there are only 5,000, and in the five years during which Lord Curzon has run his strenuous and constructive course, the long length of the Indian frontier has been held with a loss of only 109 men.

It is, therefore, with no light heart, or easy change, that Lord Curzon has turned aside from his efforts for internal reform to a hazardous enterprise such as the expedition to Tibet. He knew of the hardships which would be entailed on the army; he knew of the ignorance and folly which prevailed in the councils of Lhasa; he had appraised the impotence and unreality of the suzerainty

claimed but not exercised by China; and above all he shrank from the dread possibility of the guns and rifles being used—those guns and rifles which had to be nursed against the frost in the beds and clothing of the officers and men. It was an evil, as all war and all such expeditions must be, but it was the lesser of two evils, and as a faithful sentinel of the Empire he had to accept it. In his own words—uttered the day before the unfortunate Tibetans learnt that our troops were not mere “eidolons” and that our guns were not for mere display—he said:

“I have no desire to push on anywhere. The history of the last five years has been one of consolidation and restraint, but I would suffer any imputations rather than be an unfaithful sentinel, and allow the future peace of the country to be compromised by encroachments from outside which would only have one meaning. . . . We live in days when there is a strong main current in the direction of leaving the castle unguarded and when international rivals are closing in around us with intentions that he who runs may read.”

Lord Curzon likened India to a fortress, “with the sea as a moat on two sides, and mountains on the third. Beyond the walls is a glacis of varying breadth and dimensions. We do not want to occupy it, but we cannot afford to see it occupied by a foe. We are quite content that it should remain in the hands of allies and friends; but if unfriendly influences creep up and lodge under our walls we are compelled to intervene because danger would thereby grow up, and menace our security. This is the secret of the whole position in Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet and Siam.”

The spectacle of our army marching in winter through a country higher than the Alps, is due to the fact that Russia was on the glacis, and that Tibet, ignoring geographical facts, and abandoning the safe policy of absolute isolation from the world, had sent deputations to the Tsar, and was becoming enmeshed in the wide-cast nets of the Neva.

Russia has her Asiatic policy, vast, consistent, and, as far as it is possible to foresee, perpetual. Whatever may be the actual forces which have dictated the policy, whether they be religious, commercial, or racial, the policy is a menace to the safety of India; and those who are charged with the watch and ward of the Empire do well to be prepared with a counter policy of defence.

India is, at present, a poor, but improving, country, with great resources which merely await development. The last few years have been years of considerable progress, and Lord Curzon will not be contradicted by those who have watched recent events when he claims that India is "better equipped to face the many problems which confront her, stronger and better guarded on the frontiers, with her agriculture, industries, commerce, education, irrigation, railways, army and police brought up to a higher state of efficiency, with every part of her administrative machinery in better repair, with her credit re-established, her currency restored, and with the material prosperity of her people enhanced and their loyalty strengthened." But over this bright and hopeful light which is dawning on the great Dependency, there falls the shadow of Russian aggression, and it is grievous that the money so greatly wanted in India must be spent on the counter policy.

It is well that those who inhabit the fortress, and that those who live on the glacis over the Indian frontiers, should know that their misfortunes, whether they take the form of taxation, or of military occupation, are due, not to the "forward policy" of India's rulers, but to the aggressive policy of India's greatest enemy. There is no such thing now as a "forward policy" in India. The old idea of a Lawrence policy, and of a forward policy, as the only two alternatives, is out of date. New factors have come into play, and the Indian policy of to-day may be defined as one of preventive defence. The old controversy between the Lawrence school and the disciples of the forward policy raged around our relations with Afghanistan, but India has now by a strange destiny been brought into contact with other and more complex problems. To use Lord Curzon's words:

"Europe has woken up, and is beginning to take a revived interest in Asia. Russia, with her vast territories, her great ambitions, and her unarrested advance, has been the pioneer in this movement, and with her, or after her, have come her competitors, rivals, and allies. Thus, as all these foreigners arrive upon the scene and push forward into the vacant spots, we are slowly having a European situation recreated in Asia, with the same figures upon the stage. The great European Powers are also becoming the great Asiatic Powers."

The European situation is watched jealously and closely by the great Continental states, whose interests are so vitally concerned.



Happily, too, for mankind and civilization, the great American nation is watching the situation, and will play an important part in the Asiatic game. Is it too much to hope that the same vigilance, and the same desire for the maintenance of peace and of the *status quo*, may ere long be extended to the Asiatic replica of the European situation? Is it too much to hope that the same honest and generous presentment of India's case, as was given in the "*Débats*" of April 1st, may before long inspire and inform Continental opinion? I quote it as given in the "*Times*" of April 2nd, for it sums up in a few pregnant sentences all that need be said on the Tibetan question:

"It would be difficult not to understand England's decision. For Russia, the dominant Power in Turkestan, Tibet, is, after all, a distant country, whereas for India it is a near neighbor. As Prince Henry of Orleans was wont to say, '*Il n'y a qu'un pas de l'Inde au Thibet.*' It is true that the step is one over the Himalayas; but how can even this formidable chain be compared with the immense ice plateau where the traveller, oppressed constantly by an altitude of more than 5,000 metres, drags along for more than two months in the mud and snow without seeing a single human being, or a single tree, between the plain of Eastern Turkestan and the first encampments of the Tibetan shepherds, 150 or 200 kilometres to the north of Lhasa? It is this plateau, far more than the Himalayas, which constitutes in the north India's scientific frontier, and one can understand that England does not mean to allow this frontier to be turned."

Enough has been said, perhaps, of Russia's Asiatic policy; and the reader will have grasped the fact that the march of General Macdonald's small force into the clouds is merely a concrete demonstration of the British counter policy, and that, just as Russia has a policy comprehensive and interdependent, so too Great Britain has a counter policy in the East, in which each part is essential and vital to the maintenance of her Empire in India. The counter policy was enunciated by Lord Lansdowne last year, when he warned the world that there must be no intrusion on the glacis of Persia. It was high time that the notice boards should be put up, and if the constructive and consistent policy now inaugurated could have been announced earlier, it is possible that there would have been no mission to Tibet. We think that our policy will wear as well as Russia's Asiatic ideal. It is the outcome of necessity, and has been formulated by two statesmen who possess at once a profound knowledge of British

foreign policy, and a first-hand experience of India's requirements.

Possession in international affairs, as in law, counts for something, and our case, as the defenders and trustees of India, is a just and righteous case. Speaking more locally, and with some slight experience of India and Indian thought, I maintain that Lord Lansdowne's pronouncement has not come a day too soon, and that the visible and practical illustration of his policy will have an enormous effect throughout the length and breadth of India. Nepal signals to Benares, and Benares to Madras, and there is a "feeling of solidarity and common interest" among the peoples of India, which is perhaps insufficiently realized when great deeds are afoot. Lord Curzon does well to encourage the feeling of common interest, and the time is fast coming when the common interest of India's three hundred millions will resolve itself into the problem of devising the cheapest form of insurance against foreign aggression. Unhappily, at present most Indian publicists and thinkers spell "defence" as "defiance," and in the natural and modest efforts to guard India's safety see the old bugbear of the forward policy.

It is extremely difficult to say what will now happen in Tibet. So many ideas have been suggested, and so many anticipations have been formed which have proved wrong, that one hesitates to predict anything regarding the course of events in that queer country of magic and divination. There is a precedent which, curiously enough, has not been noticed, and the precedent may enable us to guess something of what may befall. About 1840, a Dogra General, Zorawar Singh, invaded Ladak, then the most westerly province of the high mountainous country which is spoken of as Tibet. Zorawar Singh and his small force passed through a country of mountains and glaciers, not less difficult than that which has been traversed by our troops, but he was not hampered by transport and modern requirements. In two years he conquered Ladak, which has ever since remained the peaceful appanage of Kashmir. It is worthy of notice that the leading monastery — the Lhasa of Western Tibet — Hemis, not only did not turn out to fight, but made terms with the invader, and, as far as I know, the monks of Ladak were never in the fighting line. Now, it is generally assumed that the real opposition to our arms will come from the monks of Lhasa, and we hear

of rifles which have been manufactured locally, and of a National Council at Lhasa which decided on war, collected men and distributed arms. We hear that the monks are a truculent, insolent and intensely hostile people, whereas the Generals are moderate, though it is reported that one bloodthirsty General went so far as to say that, though he did not "like meat as a rule, he would not at all mind eating the flesh of the British officers of the mission." They are quaint people in the East, and perhaps the Tibetans are the quaintest of all, and we must be prepared for surprises and extraordinary developments. It is useless to judge them by our standards, or to imagine that they will be influenced by motives which appeal to us. It is, however, safe to say that the delay in our movements due to the winter weather has already affected our prestige, and that our patience has often been mistaken at Lhasa for weakness. The season is now in our favor, the ladder-like mountains have been scaled, and all is now plain sailing to Lhasa. It has been suggested that the lamas of Lhasa, and the people of the country, do not always see eye to eye, and if we were dealing with people of an ordinary nature, we might suppose that the wounded and the friends of the slain at Guru, would comment on the fact that, while the monks made the mischief, it was the laymen who bore the punishment. But such a supposition would ignore the traditional love and the family connection which every Tibetan has with the monasteries, and it is possible that if Lhasa were threatened the whole countryside would rally to the Dalai Lama in spite of the abuses and the arrogance of his court. One has heard much about the aspirations of Lhasa and the growing desire to throw off the somewhat impalpable yoke of China, and the idea is held that the unprecedented phenomenon of a Dalai Lama spared to live till manhood is due to this deep policy. But China and her malingering Ambans, and Szechuan and her greedy officials, only obscure the simple issues of the Tibetan mission, and may very properly be cut out of the drama which we are now watching. We shall know more about such matters when we have arrived at Gyangtse.

This place, a large town lying in a valley where cultivation should furnish us with supplies, is for the present the ultimate point of the mission. There is to be no occupation or permanent intervention in Tibetan affairs, and when we have obtained satisfaction and reparation the force is to retire. Satisfaction is a

comprehensive term, and it is to be hoped that it will be forthcoming when our troops take up their abode for the summer in Gyangtse. But even if the recent affair at the hot springs of Guru does bring the Dalai Lama and his advisers to their senses—and it should be remembered that Dorjieff is still in high favor at Lhasa—some sanction and guarantee of good behavior will be required in the future. It is easy to see that a Resident at Lhasa, or even at Gyangtse might for some time give rise to embarrassment and expense; but it is difficult to suggest any form of satisfaction or reparation which would be adequate and enduring, unless we leave some representative behind us. Our experience of the Tibetan attitude to treaties would scarcely justify any but the most perennial and binding terms. It is also most natural that the British Government should hesitate to allow the business to proceed to its logical end. Pity for its misguided people, and a chivalrous regard for the sanctity of the City of the Buddhists, who form a not inconsiderable section of the population of our Empire, might well make the authorities in London pause. But, for all that, Lhasa is the logical end of the Tibetan mission. Much, however, may happen at Gyangtse in the next few months. We shall be able to become acquainted with the people, to give them good work and good wages. Kindly treatment and the many little ways in which our officers in the East win their way to the hearts of the country folk, will have their effect even in Tibet. And there is another influence which may bring some solution of our difficulties. Shigatse is not far from Gyangtse, and near Shigatse resides a very important personage—the Grand Lama of Tashe-Lhunpo, the “glorious teacher.” Some hold that he has an influence equal to, if not greater than, that exercised by the Dalai Lama; but, whether that be so or not, his influence, if he throws in his lot with our mission, would very quickly reduce the power and resources of Lhasa to insignificance. So far, it appears that the Grand Lama of the South has shown himself to be friendly, and the old device, “*divide et impera*,” may have to be invoked. It would be a mistake, however, to press this policy unduly. Though it may transpire that the Grand Lama of Tashe-Lhunpo has local claims to recognition, it must be remembered that Lhasa is of more than local interest, and that the Dalai Lama has up to the present been the paramount figure of the Buddhist world. And it may be safely assumed that the same forbearance

which has characterized our attitude towards Tibet for many years will continue to be exercised, and that every effort will be made to obtain satisfaction without destroying the anomalous, but still ancient, constitution of Lhasa. This is the real difficulty of the problem. A Buddhist kingdom is an anachronism in this age of statecraft and scientific warfare, for in a purely Buddhist country there can be no statesman and no soldier. It would not be difficult to bring about a revolution against the priests, or to induce the Grand Lama south of the Brahmaputra to set himself up as a power independent of Lhasa. Still less would it be difficult to march our troops to Lhasa, and bring the crazy city toppling to the ground. The real difficulty is to negotiate with a people of another world, strangers to common sense, comity and even to self-interest, and to convince them of our power without actually using that power. It would be a calamity if we are forced to storm Lhasa, and it would be in many ways a source of regret if we destroyed the central influence of the Buddhist world; but it is obvious that the Dalai Lama and his advisers must be brought to see the seriousness of the situation. So far our efforts in this direction have been in vain. But time works many changes, and the Dalai Lama may grow weary of his Master of Ordnance and Treasurer, Dorjieff, and may realize that there was some truth in the advice of Nepal, that "to bring about unnecessary complications with the British Government is like producing headache by twisting a rope round one's head when it is not aching."

The advance of our troops to Gyangtse will give another twist to the rope. The situation will develop slowly, and it is quite possible that the programme laid down by the British Government will require modification. By that programme there is to be no permanent intervention in Tibetan affairs in any form, and no permanent mission. Permanent intervention would no doubt make Lhasa an impossibility, and reduce Tibet to the status of Ladak. Many will contend that this would be no matter for regret, but the object of our mission is not to reform the Lamaic constitution, but to secure a working convention with our neighbor, to settle the northern border of Sikkim, to obtain reparation for the arrest and, it is feared, the murder of British subjects, and to receive some explanation of the insolent treatment accorded to our mission at Khamba-jong.

We hope that these objects may be secured by the tact and patience of our officers, but we think that, while there is to be no permanent intervention, there must be some permanent security. We do not anticipate that the appointment of a British envoy at Lhasa would lead to danger, though it would undoubtedly be a source of anxiety and expense. As an experiment, we might adopt a system somewhat similar to that obtaining in Afghanistan. We might send one of our Buddhist officials to Lhasa to act as our representative and intelligence officer, and we might fairly ask the Dalai Lama to depute some responsible and substantial Tibetan to reside as envoy in India. We might, no doubt, annex territory by way of reparation, but we have disclaimed the idea of annexation, and all we want is security for the future, and some guarantee against a recurrence of the heavy expense which we have incurred on the present expedition. In the old days we should have taken hostages. This, or the retention of valuable property by way of a pledge, would be in keeping with Tibetan ideas. But we have no doubt that Lord Curzon and his resourceful officers will find some practicable and acceptable method for preventing future troubles, for safeguarding the "glacis," and for protecting our frontier and our subjects.

WALTER LAWRENCE.